AFRICA RECOVERY

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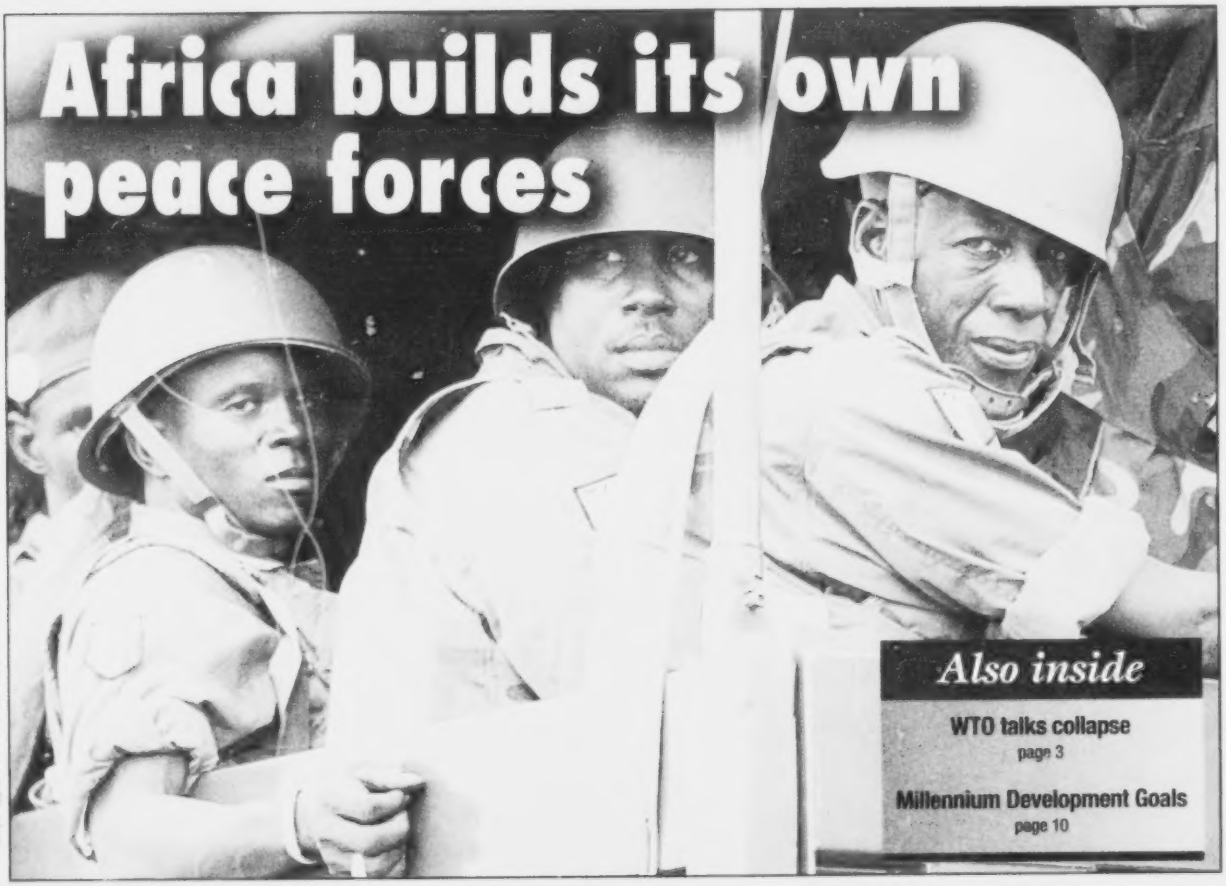
Africa builds its own peace forces



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By *Ernest Harsch*

Caught in the crossfire of a raging civil war, residents of Monrovia became increasingly vocal throughout July in appealing to the US and other major world powers to send peacekeepers to Liberia. To dramatize their plight, they laid out in front of the US embassy more than a dozen bodies of civilians killed by shelling.

By early August three US warships were anchored off the coast, but except for several units sent into the city to protect the US embassy, the 2,300 marines on board did not step ashore. Instead, on 4 August, the first contingent of Nigerian troops arrived in Monrovia, the advance guard of a West African peacekeeping force that eventually grew to 3,600.

The Nigerians received a rousing welcome. Some of their officers were hoisted aloft by cheering crowds. Women swept their head wraps along the road in front of the Nigerian troop carriers in a gesture of greeting, while children leaped to touch the hands of the peacekeepers. A man yelled at a US journalist, "Where's the American troops?"

Such scenes in Monrovia reflect the reality of peace efforts in Africa today. In league with the UN or on their own, African mediators, troops and civil society activists are playing an increasingly

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Hope seen in the ashes of Cancún

WTO trade talks collapse, as Africa and allies stand firm

By **Gumisai Mutume**
Cancun

Despite failure to reach agreement at the recent World Trade Organization ministerial meeting in Cancún, Mexico, developing countries will look back at it not only as a missed opportunity, but also as a potential turning point for the 148-member organization. The 10-14 September ministerial meeting of the WTO saw the emergence of a coalition of developing countries that helped block the adoption of an agreement which they viewed as largely ignoring their interests. It also laid the foundations for new power relations in the global trade body.

"I am convinced that Cancún will be remembered as the conference that signalled the emergence of a less autocratic multilateral trading system," notes Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim. As negotiations resume at the WTO headquarters in Geneva, "developing countries will not be reduced to the role of supporting actors in discussions that affect their future development prospects." At the Cancún meeting, Brazil played a leading role among the Group of 21 (G-21) developing countries that presented a united front against the positions of the dominant trading powers — Canada, the European Union (EU), Japan and the US.

The WTO ministerial meeting is the agency's highest decision-making body, convening every two years to review progress on negotiations and set the agenda for the following two years. With member countries wedded to widely divergent positions, this year's meeting collapsed, the second time this has happened in the last three ministerial meetings.

Doha round stalled

The Cancún meeting was held at the mid-point of the current round of trade negotiations launched in Doha, Qatar, in 2001. High on Africa's agenda in Cancún were demands for reforms in agricultural trade that would remove subsidies in industrial countries and provide greater access to global markets. African countries were seeking redress on lopsided agreements of the last round — the Uruguay Round — and hoping to secure binding commitments on technical assistance. They have also been calling for a swift conclusion to ongoing negotiations on "special and differential treatment" — provisions which, for example, would allow developing countries more time to comply with WTO rules.

High on Africa's agenda in Cancún were demands for reforms in agricultural trade that would remove subsidies in industrial countries and provide greater access to global markets.

Because no agreement came out of Cancún, many of these issues, which had already suffered substantial delays and missed deadlines, remain unresolved. When it became clear that no agreement would emerge, ministers adopted a brief statement asking the WTO director general to convene a meeting "at senior officials level no later than 15 December," to continue the negotiations.

"One reason for a lack of agreement was that a large group of developing countries, including many African countries, felt that many of the developed countries were unwilling to do enough to free up agriculture trade, in particular through the reduction of subsidies," says WTO Deputy Director-General Kipkorir Aly Azad Rana. Another obstacle was a demand by industrial nations to extend negotiations to a whole new set of international obligations — investment, competition policy, transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation. "For their part, developed countries argued that the developing countries should be willing to do more to open their own markets," says Mr. Rana.

According to the Doha declaration, negotiations on these new issues can only be launched through explicit consensus. At Cancún, a group of 70 developing countries, led by Malaysia and including many African countries, refused to give a go-ahead since many issues from the last and the current round remain unresolved. "The call from Africa for a fair and just global trading system has been construed in some quarters to be indicative of a growing radicalization of the African position on international trade issues," noted Trade Minister Jaya Cuttaree of Mauritius, who heads the Africa Group. "Nothing could be further from the truth." He said the continent is merely responding to its weakening trade position, growing poverty and realization that it will fail to meet the

African agricultural exporters, especially of cotton, failed to obtain reductions in damaging Northern farm subsidies.

world's Millennium Development Goals — including cutting global poverty in half by 2015 — in the present climate.

Agricultural subsidies

Since the conclusion of the Uruguay Round in 1994, developing countries have complained that existing rules are tilted heavily in favour of the major industrial nations and are causing the world's poor to sink deeper into poverty. For African and other developing countries, the yardstick for success in Cancún was to have been the resolution of a long-standing dispute over agricultural subsidies. Despite pledges by industrial nations to reduce state subsidies paid out to their farmers, these have continued to grow and now average $300 bn annually — more than five times greater than official development assistance to poor countries. A few weeks before the Cancún meeting, the EU and US proposed a framework for advancing agricultural negotiations. It offered curbs on subsidies and the lowering of rich-country barriers to developing countries' exports. But the deal was criticized by developing countries because none of the cuts was quantified, no products specified and no binding dates for reform laid out. At the start of talks in Cancún, the offer was immediately rejected as inadequate by the G-21, which had begun forming during the weeks prior to the ministerial conference.

African countries expected the Cancún declaration to produce a timetable for the eventual elimination of subsidies that would take effect at the conclusion of the Doha round, scheduled for 2005. They also hoped for a ruling that would immediately end cotton subsidies. In Cancún, the WTO devoted a plenary session to the "cotton initiative," proposed by four countries — Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali — acting on behalf of West and Central African cotton-producers, which account for 90 per cent of Africa's total cotton output. The four countries proposed that the US and EU embark on a three-year phase-out plan for cotton subsidies and set up a transitional mechanism to offset the losses currently being incurred by African cotton farmers. In 2001 alone, sub-Saharan cotton producers lost $300 mn in potential revenue because of declining world prices pushed down in part because of the cotton surpluses in Northern countries that subsidize their farmers. The US spends $4 bn on its 25,000 cotton farmers and the EU maintains an equally high subsidy regime on various crops.

The US delegation met with the four African countries before the start of negotiations in Cancún and suggested that they focus instead on diversifying their economies from cotton production to textiles. That way they could then benefit from preferential access to the US market under the African Growth and Opportunity Act. The African countries felt that the offer was an attempt to deflect attention from the core problem. However, their expectations were raised during the plenary session when many countries, including the G-21, supported the initiative. Director-General Supachai Panitchpakdi described the initiative as unusual, but urged WTO members to give it serious consideration. The African countries, he said, were not asking for preferences, but an end to trade distortions. Industrial nations such as Australia and Canada supported the initiative, while the EU announced that it was willing to play its part.

Despite pledges by industrial nations to reduce state subsidies paid out to their farmers, these have continued to grow and now average $300 bn annually — more than five times greater than official development assistance to poor countries.

'Not even a mouse'

But when the draft final declaration that had been negotiated over the course of the conference emerged, it ignored the demands of

many ministers: the mountain gave birth to a mouse. No, not even a mouse: an ant."

Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade summed up the feeling among many African delegations, saying that the WTO's policy on liberalizing agricultural trade had "completely failed" the continent. In a message to the meeting, President Wade noted that more than 40 years of international development policies, poverty has not been eradicated in Africa. "I am convinced that agricultural subsidies, which ruin the lot of farmers in the Third World, are among the key factors of our impoverishment since they destroy all our efforts and deprive us of the only income [emanating from trade] that could have changed our conditions," he said.

Emergence of a new power

The G-21, which is still expanding, offered a strong counter-balance to the negotiating positions of the countries that have traditionally dominated the WTO — Canada, the EU, US and Japan — collectively known as the Quad countries. By September 15, the G-21 was made up of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand and Venezuela. These countries are home to more than 50 per cent of the world's population and more than 60 per cent of its farmers. They produce about 25 per cent of global farm exports.

The G-21 does not represent a "south versus north" approach, says South African Trade Minister Alec Erwin. Instead it represents "the vision and the leadership that the world and our people have long hoped for in the face of the challenge of addressing the imbalances and inequities of the current agricultural trade system."

Port of Dakar, Senegal. In alliance with other developing regions, Africa will press for gains in future trade talks

Proposals from the Quad countries had served as the basis for the draft declaration that was introduced for discussion in Cancún. On the eve of the first day of the conference, the G-21 countries held a press conference announcing the group's existence and rejecting the proposed draft declaration. They said the declaration was based almost entirely on joint EU and US submissions, while many of the concerns developing countries had expressed since Doha were largely ignored. The G-21 instead offered a counterproposal designed to force more significant reductions in domestic and export subsidies while imposing fewer market access obligations on developing countries.

Unprecedented solidarity

While publicly applauding the formation of the G-21, delegations from industrial countries tried in private to undermine the union, in some cases by offering bilateral deals to individual G-21 countries. Opponents of fair trade are "opting for divide-and-rule tactics against developing countries," said Mr Erwin. They are "dividing us on the basis of those included and excluded in preferences, on the basis of those more developed and less developed, and on the basis of the continents from which we come."

Open threats were also used. Senator Charles Grassley, who heads the US Senate Finance Committee, said he would use his position to "carefully scrutinize" how countries behaved in Cancún. "The US evaluates potential partners for free trade agreements on an ongoing basis," he said. "I'll take note of those nations that played a constructive role in Cancún, and those nations that didn't."

During the meeting, however, the G-21 did not break up as had been predicted. Malawi through the conference. Minister Cuttaree, who headed the Africa Group, announced that it was discussing the possibilities of forging an alliance with the G-21 in areas of mutual interest such as agriculture.

According to UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Secretary-General Rubens Ricupero, the emergence of the G-21 is an important factor for future WTO negotiations, as the major trading nations will be forced to take the new power reality into account.

"The defiant tone and unprecedented solidarity among the G-21 and other groups of developing countries was reminiscent of the anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s and 1970s," noted Mr. Rick Rowden of the non-governmental organization ActionAid. During that period, developing countries broke free of colonial powers through struggles for national liberation and formed the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 nations at the UN General Assembly, which called for a new international economic order. "During this era, trade talks and foreign aid negotiations used to occur within UNCTAD, where the poor countries could negotiate in large blocs and had strength in numbers when dealing with rich countries," noted Mr. Rowden.

Future uncertain

Upon hearing the news that the talks had collapsed, African civil society groups in the conference centre erupted into song and dance. Many felt that even though there was no agreement, it was better than having walked away with an accord that did not serve Africa's interests, as had happened previously.

But because there was no agreement, the fate of many of the outstanding issues remains uncertain. The current round of negotiations, already having missed many deadlines, will almost certainly not be concluded as scheduled by January 2005. Any gains that African countries make under the current round would therefore have to wait until the round's final conclusion, when all new agreements would take effect.

The collapse of the talks also raises serious concerns about the future of the organization. EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy described the WTO as a "medieval institution that needs to be revamped strongly." Analysts warn that the breakdown in Cancún could divert countries away from the multilateral system towards bilateral and regional trade agreements. The US has already indicated it may begin concentrating on these. Some trade experts noted that the Cancún experience shows that the WTO negotiating process, which is based on consensus, is too unwieldy to produce results and needs urgent reform.

Rules negotiated by all

According to Mr. Irungu Houghton of the Kenya office of Oxfam, the WTO is structured in a manner that suits major powers with the ability to field large delegations. "The negotiations in various committees take place simultaneously, and some of them take place throughout the night," Mr. Houghton told *Africa Recovery*. For instance, the European Commission sent more than 600 technical staff to Cancún — "one for every comma, observers joked. On the other hand, the African Union had only 10 delegates.

In a message to the Cancún meeting, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that for trade to benefit all, there is need for global rules genuinely negotiated by all, "in the interest of all, and adhered to by all." At present, he said, "there is too much closed-door decision-making, too much protection of special interests and too many broken promises." The issues are often technical, and "do not usually lend themselves to dramatic television coverage, like war or extreme weather," said Mr. Annan. "But let there be no doubt, the damage is profound and the victims can be counted in the billions." ■

Tokyo summit urges more support for Africa

Asian-African cooperation in implementation of NEPAD

By ***Ernest Harsch***
Tokyo

Japan and other Asian countries reaffirmed their backing for Africa's own initiatives for development and peace at the close of a three-day summit meeting in Tokyo of leaders from the two continents. "We ... pledge to support Africa's ownership," especially in implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the delegates stated in their final declaration.

The Third Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD III), held 29 September - 1 October, was the largest by far since the first such meeting 10 years ago. It drew more than 1,000 participants, including 23 African heads of state or government, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and delegates from 89 countries and 47 regional and international organizations.

The summit, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in a message delivered on his behalf by Under-Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari, "continues Japan's remarkable record of solidarity and support for Africa and provides a forum for deepening Asian-African cooperation." In addition to the government of Japan, the World Bank and the Global Coalition for Africa, TICAD III was co-organized by the UN's Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (headed by Mr. Gambari) and the UN Development Programme.

The decade-long TICAD process "has proven to be an excellent framework for the promotion of partnership towards Africa's sustainable development," said Mozambique President Joaquim Chissano, speaking as the current chairman of the African Union. He noted that TICAD's principles of African ownership and international partnership fall "well within the spirit" of NEPAD.

Asian pledges

Mr. Chissano also emphasized the importance of Asian cooperation with Africa and encouraged deeper involvement in NEPAD's implementation by a wide range of Asian countries. One plenary session focused on that issue, and featured pledges by Malaysia, China, the Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand to promote more technical assistance, trade and investment in Africa.

As the richest and most industrialized Asian nation, Japan will continue to play a pivotal role in such cooperation, Prime Minister Koizumi said in his keynote address. Since the TICAD process began a decade earlier, he reported, Japan has provided $12 bn in aid to Africa, trained more than 10,000 Africans in Japan and sent more than 7,000 Japanese experts to Africa. In addition to other forms of assistance, he said, Japan will provide $1 bn in grants over the next five years for programmes in education, water, food assistance and health, including measures against HIV/AIDS.

TICAD "has proven to be an excellent framework for the promotion of partnership towards Africa's sustainable development," said Mozambique President Joaquim Chissano (left), shown at the conference with President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Republic of Congo.

Japan's assistance to Africa will rest on "three pillars," the prime minister stressed — human-centred development, poverty reduction through economic growth and the consolidation of peace — all of which correspond to NEPAD's priorities. "Japan sincerely respects the will of Africans themselves to make the 21st century the African century," he said.

International challenges

When African leaders took the floor, they invariably reaffirmed their own commitment to take primary responsibility for overcoming poverty, low levels of agricultural and industrial development and political insecurity and social strife. But they also pointed to the need for a more supportive international environment.

In this respect, noted Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Japan was one of the first developed countries to recognize "the risk of marginalization of Africa" when the Cold War ended at the start of the 1990s. In response, he observed, Japan called the first TICAD conference in 1993 to help draw international attention to Africa's needs. "While there have been renewed commitments to Africa's development over the past few years, this is not the time for us to relax our efforts to put Africa's development at the centre of the global agenda for peace and development."

Mr. Gambari, the UN special adviser on Africa, said that such efforts to keep Africa on the world's agenda are particularly important now, as "the international community is focusing its attention on Iraq, the Middle East and the war against terrorism, especially after September 11" (the 2001 attacks in the US).

While appreciating the ongoing efforts by Japan and other Asian countries to support Africa, many African participants also expressed a desire that more be done, not only in the delivery of aid and debt relief, but also towards the promotion of greater investment and trade, including greater access to developed country markets for African exports.

The collapse of the World Trade Organization talks in Cancun, Mexico, just a few weeks earlier came up repeatedly in the Tokyo discussions. A number of African leaders noted that the persistence of domestic farm subsidies in the developed countries tends to drive down world prices for African agricultural exports, undercutting efforts to increase African rural incomes.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni observed that the benefits of the aid that his country has received from Western countries and Japan have been "wiped out several times over by the inequitable trade arrangements." African countries have been seeking to expand exports and reduce their dependence on aid, Mr. Museveni pointed out. But "the greatest subversion to Africa's development has been accounted for by the protectionism in the EU, USA, Canada and Japan."

The final conference declaration, marking TICAD's tenth anniversary, acknowledged this concern. In addition to calling for more aid and investment in Africa, it stressed the promotion of "market access and fair trade in order to support the efforts of African countries to gain a meaningful foothold in the global market place." ■

Africa takes on the digital divide

New information technologies change the lives of those in reach

By **Gumisai Mutume**

Across Africa, new information technologies are rapidly changing the lives of a small but growing number of people. In rural Togo a farmer gets real-time information on market prices in the capital, Lomé, through a cellular phone. In Accra, Ghana, entrepreneurs who in the past were not able to get a dial tone on their land-line telephones can now connect immediately using Internet telephony, technology that allows phone calls to be made through the Internet. And in Niger, the Bankilare Community Information Centre downloads audio programmes from the African Learning Channel and rebroadcasts them on local radio.

So far, these are some of the few, fortunate Africans. For most people even making a telephone call is still a remote possibility in an era when most of the world is now communicating almost instantly across cities, regions and the globe using wireless and satellite technologies to send high-speed electronic messages.

Africa has the fewest telephone lines, radios, television sets, computers and Internet users of any part of the world. These tools, used to package and transmit information and knowledge, are broadly referred to as information and communications technologies (ICTs). The gap between those with access to ICTs and those without is generally referred to as the "digital divide." It is most extreme in Africa, where in 2001, out of 800 million people, only 1 in 4 had a radio, 1 in 13 a television set, 1 in 40 a telephone and 1 out of 130 a computer. The divide widens in Africa's countryside, where a lack of roads, telephone lines and electricity separates the rural majority from their urban counterparts.

Bridging the digital divide

"The digital gap brings with it a danger of isolating certain peoples, those in Africa in particular," says Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade. "It is paradoxical and ironic that the continent which invented writing . . . [is] excluded from universal knowledge." In December, President Wade will be popularizing his "digital solidarity" programme at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to be held in Geneva, Switzerland. Under the programme, technologically advanced nations would commit to assisting poorer ones. A country can express solidarity, for example, by signing onto a digital charter committing itself to "a specified, quantified action for the benefit of countries where the rate [of Internet access] is lower than a given level," explains President Wade. A digital solidarity fund should be set up to pay for ICT projects in poor countries, he says, financed by "raising large amounts of money collected painlessly because the contributions are so small." Levies of one US cent could be charged on every international call or one dollar on the purchase of each personal computer or software package.

African leaders looking for ways to bridge the digital divide between their region and the rest of the world see the WSIS as an opportunity to obtain international commitments to extend information and communications technologies to the majority of their people. The summit is expected to adopt a plan of action to close the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" of information technology. At its summit in July, the African Union passed a resolution stressing the "importance of the information society on economic, socio-political and cultural development and the strategic objectives of developing countries." The second part of WSIS will be held from 16-18 November 2005, in Tunisia, which first proposed holding the meeting to promote the use of ICTs to overcome poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals agreed to by world leaders in 2000.

Extending the arm of technology

Low bandwidth (the amount of data transmitted through a communications line) and expensive call charges characterize most of Africa's telecommunications facilities. An analysis of Internet use can give a representative picture of the ICT situation in Africa, says Mr. Mike Jensen, an independent ICT consultant based in South Africa, since connecting to the Internet involves different individual ICT components such as computers, telephones and satellites.

By mid 2002, 1.7 million Africans had dial-up Internet services, 1.2 million of them in South Africa and North Africa alone. Assuming that three-to-five people use each Internet-connected computer, notes Mr. Jensen, it is possible that 5-8 million Africans have access to the Internet. In sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa), there are some 1.5-2.5 million users — one in every 250-400 people, compared to 1 in 15 people in the rest of the world. In North America and Europe, 1 in every 2 people has access to the Internet. Given that timely access to news and information can promote trade, education, employment, health and wealth, "too many of the world's people remain untouched by this revolution," says UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. "The stakes are high indeed."

Africa has, however, made significant improvements in telecommunications over the past few years. The number of land telephone lines increased from 12.5 mn in 1995 to 21 mn in 2001, mostly, Mr. Jensen states, due to a

Internet company advertises in Côte d'Ivoire. Despite advances, only a tiny fraction of Africans have Internet access.

regional push to deregulate the sector. There has been a rapid increase in the number of public phone booths and community telecommunications centres or tele-centres, he says. In Senegal, "there are over 10,000 commercially run public telephone bureaus, employing 15,000 people and generating over 30 per cent of the entire [telephone] network's revenue."

Many African countries are increasingly leapfrogging old technologies and avoiding the expense of laying land lines. As a result wireless technologies and mobile phones are becoming the preferred means of communication. In 2001 there were an estimated 24 mn mobile phones in Africa compared to 21 mn fixed-line phones. With the number of users doubling every year, "Africa is now the fastest growing cellular market in the world," says Mr. Muriuki Mureithi, chief executive officer at Summit Strategies, a Kenya-based telecommunications consultancy.

Information as a human right

One of the major issues to be discussed at the WSIS in December is the right to communicate. Civil society groups in Africa say that as countries rush to privatize infrastructure, they are forgetting people's rights to communicate. While no universal definition of this right yet exists, civil society groups say it entails guaranteeing everyone access to affordable communications tools.

To achieve this, governments need to strike a balance between strengthening public communications facilities, often the only means of communication for poor and rural dwellers, and commercialization, notes the African Civil Society Caucus, a group of African non-governmental organizations participating in the WSIS. "The right to communicate is a familiar one to African people and we assert that it is a fundamental human right that should be seen as the platform on which a global information society is built," notes the caucus. The group says that most of the technology being developed is very expensive, putting even basic communications beyond the reach of the poor. The caucus is also calling on African governments to support the creation of African-language computer programmes to enable the majority of Africans, who do not speak English or French, to be able to participate.

To facilitate universal access, Africa needs to be innovative in its use of tele-centres, says Mr. Adama Samassekou, Mali's former education minister and now president of the Preparatory Committee of the WSIS. Tele-centres allow many people to share ICT resources. "There is no need for each to have his own computer," he says. The continent could also learn from other developing regions that are producing cheap, affordable computers to broaden access. "We have good initiatives taking place in the South, like in India, the 'simputer' — simple computer — and Brazil has its popular Computadora," Mr. Samassekou told *Africa Recovery*. The simputer is a low-cost, hand-held device developed by Indian engineers to take the Internet to the rural masses. And the Computadora is a bare-bones machine without "frills" such as floppy disks, costing about $300 and referred to by ICT experts as "a PC for the people, a Volkscomputer."

> "The digital gap brings with it a danger of isolating certain peoples, those in Africa in particular."
>
> — Abdoulaye Wade, President of Senegal

ICT for development

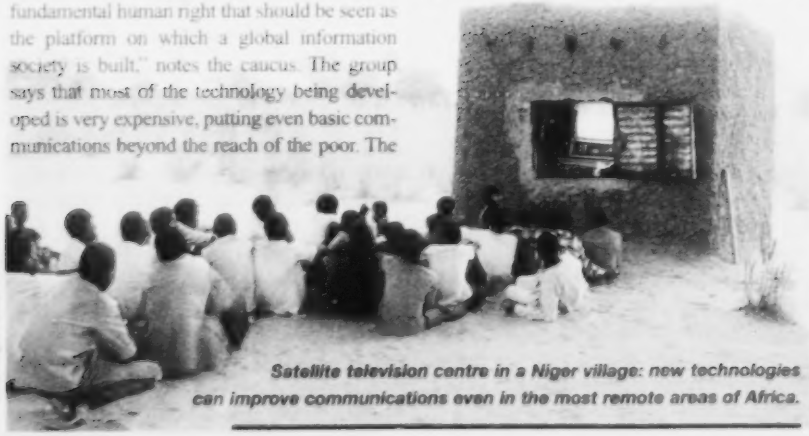
Much of the drive to expand ICT access stems from the belief that such technologies are tools for development. While there are divergent views over the nature and scope of the contribution they can make, there is widespread acknowledgement that ICTs can extend services such as health care to poor communities. In South Africa, a tele-medicine project at Tygerberg Children's Hospital in Cape Town, launched in 1996, links its medical experts to three hospitals in underprivileged districts. In 1994, the new government inherited a system which directed most public health funds to urban, often whites-only hospitals. District hospitals and clinics — responsible for primary care in towns and rural areas populated by black people — were under-resourced. Today, most specialists continue to work in urban areas. Patients requiring specialized treatment must either travel for hundreds of kilometres or be treated by practitioners with only general training and experience.

Experts at Tygerberg shorten the distance between them and their rural patients by using a computer, printer, scanner and digital camera. Through a dial-up connection the district hospital's doctors scan x-rays and electro-cardiographs and e-mail them, together with blood test results and digital photographs, to Tygerberg where a diagnosis is made and relayed back to the district hospital.

In Zimbabwe, the Kubatana project, a website linking 230 civil and community-based groups, provides information on new legislation, the electoral system and voter registration procedures, as well as major social issues confronting the country, such as HIV/AIDS. Owners of the website describe their work as "electronic activism." Users say the network is particularly useful given the current clampdown on the media in Zimbabwe. It reaches out to Zimbabweans who do not have computers at home or at work through the growing number of public Internet facilities emerging across the country. During major rights campaigns, members of the network have asked those with computers to print campaign material and hand it out or post it to those without access.

A "friendship tree" — a contact list of about 100 Zimbabweans — is activated by owners of the site every time an activist is arrested to ensure that witnesses are available to monitor the court proceedings. "One of the most powerful things we can do in situations of chaos is to become a witness," Ms. Bev Clark, one of the founders of Kubatana, notes in a series of case studies on ICTs conducted by the International Institute for Communication and Development, a non-profit foundation based in the Netherlands.

Perhaps the most popular development use of ICTs in Africa is in education. "Virtual" universities and other institutions are springing



Satellite television centre in a Niger village: new technologies can improve communications even in the most remote areas of Africa.

Public call phone centre in a poor community in South Africa. Africa's cellular market is the fastest growing in the world.

up to meet the challenge of providing education to a growing number of students with limited resources. Less well known are attempts to use ICTs to rehabilitate child ex-combatants. Among its education promotion activities in 30 African countries, SchoolNet Africa, an independent organization based in South Africa, trains former child soldiers in Angola, Liberia and Rwanda. By next year the programme will have reached more than 100 children in the three countries, equipping them with computer skills and providing psychological counselling.

In Sierra Leone, more than 200 young people affected by war have participated in a project run by the non-governmental International Education and Research Network. Their multimedia showcase on the Internet includes essays, images and music "that tells of the human toll of our civil war," says Mr. Andrew Greene, a volunteer trainer at the project. He says the inaccessibility of the Internet in his country has been the biggest challenge facing the project. "This exercise is painstaking as we must hire a bus to get access to the Internet" in urban areas. When they cannot hire a bus, the students walk and then often have to queue up for hours waiting for computers at Internet cafes. The project has touched the hearts of many people around the world, says Mr. Greene. He adds, "the UN office of displaced persons is considering it as a potential model for use in four additional parts of the world that have been affected by war." Cambodia, Palestine, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

Seeking political mileage

In South Africa a group of academics recently launched an online Northern Sotho-English dictionary — the first of its kind — to help develop a language, one of South Africa's 11 official ones, that has historically been neglected. In Uganda, an online counselling service was launched in May to train teachers and students to counsel young people in HIV prevention and care. But many local ICT initiatives such as these are hindered by the lack of broader national strategies.

Over the last decade, African leaders have adopted declarations and resolutions to speed the development of information technology on the continent. In 1996, the Organization of African Unity adopted the Africa Information Society Initiative as the guiding framework for ICT efforts in Africa. Under the initiative, heads of state agreed that their countries would develop national ICT policies and strategies. Many have yet to do so. Last year, at a regional African conference in Bamako, Mali, to prepare for the WSIS, a declaration urged African countries to remove duties levied on ICT hardware and software until the second phase of WSIS in Tunis in 2005. Many countries are yet to comply. Governments blame the lack of action on a shortage of resources, especially financial.

African leaders continue to seek ways around this. The continent's new development framework, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) places ICTs among eight priority sectors. Under NEPAD, African governments pledge to double the number of telephone lines in Africa by 2005, lower costs and improve reliability of communications services.

To implement the ICT goals of NEPAD, an e-Africa Commission has been set up by continental leaders, chaired by Mr. Alpha Oumar Konare, former Malian president and current chairman of the Commission of the African Union. He is proposing a "debt for connectivity" programme whereby rich countries agree to write-off at least 1 per cent of the total debt of every African country each year and place it into a common ICT fund. Last year, sub-Saharan Africa's total debt was $204 bn. "The burden that Africa drags upon its feet, and that prevents it from taking off, is debt, always debt," says Mr. Konare.

Sometimes the problem is simply poor government planning, notes Mr. Fred Kofi de Heer-Mensah of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration. He says that the continent's Internet development is often hindered by measures taken by governments. A few years ago, the previous Ghanaian government jailed the heads of a number of leading Internet service providers. Although they were later exonerated, they had been accused of breaking telephone regulations by allowing subscribers to make phone calls over the Internet. Internet service providers, often using high-speed satellite links, were able to provide their clients with extremely cheap telephone call rates, even on international calls, competing for revenue with regular phone companies.

"Internet telephony is changing the whole power structure," says Mr. Francis Quartey, chief technology officer of Intercom Data Network and one of those jailed. "The dangerous thing is that the power elite are responding out of fear and ignorance."

It is also poor government strategy that results in expensive charges for communication, says Mr. de Heer-Mensah. In many countries, computers and cellular phones are defined as luxury items and are taxed heavily. Many poorer African countries charge steep levies for Internet access, while the relatively well-off ones, such as South Africa, provide cheap, even free Internet access for academic institutions, he says. Cheap access can stimulate the development of local content for the Internet and in turn generate a local audience. In South Africa, dial-up rates can be as low as $5 a month, affordable for most urban dwellers. In other countries, the monthly rates can exceed $30. Surprisingly, he says, "these are the countries with all sorts of control mechanisms."

To deal with its daunting challenges, Africa will need more candid and vigorous dialogue between ordinary citizens and their leaders. According to Mr. Joseph Okpaku, president of Telecom Africa Corporation, a US company, Africa faces two choices: "We go on engaging in pat conversations which, while preserving our image, allow our problems to fester. Or we find the courage to address our critical problems." ■

Africa struggles to attain millennium goals

Progress and setbacks in continent's efforts to improve well-being

By **Michael Fleshman**

In the cruel calculus of absolute poverty, the decision to send Suzan Mwase to school in 1993 instead of her sisters was wrenchingly practical. Born the last of three daughters to subsistence farmers in a remote district of rural Malawi, there was money enough only for one. Extra hands were needed on the farm if the family was to pay the $1.30 annual school fee, and the older girls would be more productive.

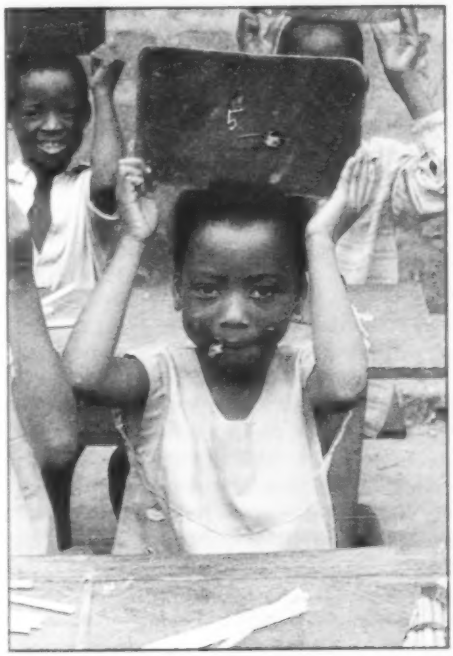
It was a dilemma faced by hundreds of thousands of parents in a country where most people were desperately poor. Education barely accounted for 10 per cent of national expenditures, and school enrolment and literacy rates had hovered around 50 per cent for decades. The following year a newly elected government announced the abolition of school fees, but few expected the removal of such a small levy to have much impact on Malawi's deep-rooted education problems.

No one was prepared, therefore, for the 1 million eager new students who showed up on the first day of school. They overwhelmed a system expecting 10,000 additional enrolments, and sent parents and community leaders, government officials and international aid agencies scrambling to find everything from teachers and desks to pencils and paper.

Somehow they succeeded, and a decade later, despite the enduring poverty, the ravages of drought and famine, and the murderous spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Malawi has kept the school doors open to the poor. As a result, literacy rates have climbed, the primary school enrolment rate, if not the graduation rate, is among the highest in the world and education now accounts for nearly a quarter of the national budget.

Malawi's unexpected step forward in education is one of the successes being achieved by Africans in the struggle for economic and social development. On a continent too often perceived as a charity case, Malawi demonstrates how determined political leadership, combined with vigorous civil society participation and only modest increases in external assistance can improve the lives of millions, and help the continent achieve the ambitious development objectives contained in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goals, which include halving the number of people in absolute poverty, achieving universal primary education for both girls and boys, and securing deep reductions in child and maternal mortality rates by 2015, were adopted by the international community at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000 (see box, next page).

The importance of the goals, noted Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a recent report to the General Assembly, is that, for the first time, the world has agreed on "a measurable set of human development benchmarks" to evaluate poverty-reduction efforts, with deadlines for achieving them. Many developing countries, donors and non-governmental organizations have made reaching the MDGs their top priority, he noted, and "for every goal there are encouraging signs of progress in some areas." But as the world reaches midpoint in the 1990-2015 MDG timetable, Mr. Annan also cautioned that "there are worrying signs of stagnation and reversal in others."



Primary school in Benin. Achieving universal primary schooling by 2015 is one of the Millennium Development Goals.

Africa lagging behind

Nowhere are the signs more ominous than in sub-Saharan Africa, the world's poorest and least developed region. Africa entered the new millennium with the highest poverty and child mortality rates, and the lowest school enrolment figures in the world. Child mortality rates in Africa changed little during the 1990s, due largely to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which eroded the gains in infant and maternal health made by some countries. Much the same can be said for Africa's primary school enrolments, which rose from a world low of 56 per cent in 1991 to just 59 per cent a decade later. This is also partly a result of HIV/AIDS, which has forced many children, particularly girls, to withdraw from school to care for sick relatives and has reduced families' ability to pay school fees.

Conflict, as Mr. Annan noted, is another major obstacle to progress on the MDGs, as education and health services collapse and hundreds of thousands of families flee their communities to become refugees or internally displaced people, and resources are invested in defence instead of development.

The 1990s saw an actual decline in average African per capita income and an increase in the number of people living on $1 per day or less from 241 million in 1990 to 315 million in 1999 — nearly half of Africa's population. Economic stagnation, combined with declining levels of development aid and private investment, deteriorating terms of trade, an unsustainable debt burden, and the ravages of conflict and HIV/AIDS and other diseases, have left Africa with fewer resources to invest in development, and more vulnerable to global economic shocks and environmental disasters like droughts and floods.

The World Bank estimates that Africa's economies must grow at a sustained rate of at least 7-8 per cent annually if they are to lift significant numbers of people out of poverty and attain the MDGs. But growth averaged only about half that during the 1990s, and the medium-term prospects are not encouraging. Mr. Patrick Asea, a senior economist with the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), reported to African finance ministers in Addis Ababa in early June that sub-Saharan Africa's economy grew by a disappointing 3.2 per cent

last year, well below the 4.3 per cent rate in 2001 and barely enough to keep pace with population growth. Economic recovery in the US and Europe should modestly boost Africa's performance this year, he noted, but the number of Africans in absolute poverty is nonetheless expected to increase to as much as 426 million by the 2015 deadline.

"It is now generally agreed that Africa — is the one region in the world that is unlikely to achieve the MDGs," African Development Bank President Omar Kabbaj told the finance ministers in Addis Ababa. "The problem that our continent faces is that general progress — involving a large number of countries — has yet to be achieved."

Amid difficulties: progress

"If you take Africa as a whole, it is not doing well" in reaching the MDGs, acknowledged Mr. Jan Vandemoortele, the head of the UN Development Programme's poverty reduction group. "But that doesn't mean there is no progress being made in Africa," he told *Africa Recovery* in New York. "We have to be careful that averages don't get in the way of understanding more complex realities."

Indeed, in some countries the progress on some MDGs has been considerable. Gambia, with almost 60 per cent of its citizens in absolute poverty, is nevertheless among the five countries in the world to reduce child mortality rates, while Burkina Faso recently reversed a long decline in vaccination rates and exceeded its own ambitious targets for immunization against tuberculosis and measles. Senegal and Uganda have dramatically reduced HIV infection rates through innovative education and prevention programmes that are among the most effective in the world. In Kenya, the new government's decision to abolish primary school fees earlier this year put an additional 1.5 million children in the classroom.

The end of conflicts in Angola and Sierra Leone, and progress towards resolving the regional conflict centred in the Democratic Republic of Congo — success stories in themselves — are also expected to pay short-term economic and development dividends as citizens and governments turn to the task of reconstruction.

There is some good economic news too. Eleven African countries posted growth rates above 5 per cent last year, including four — Cape Verde, Mozambique, Uganda and Mauritius — that have had sustained growth rates above 6 per cent for a decade or more. In Uganda's case, growth has lifted 4 million people from the ranks of the absolutely poor and reduced the poverty rate from 56 per cent to 35 per cent in just 8 years. In Ghana too, a decade of growth has permitted 2 million people to escape abject poverty.

Mr. Kabbaj and other economists argue that the countries making the fastest progress towards the MDGs are those that have maintained macro-economic discipline, embraced market reforms and democracy and improved the climate for both domestic and foreign investment by strengthening legal and judicial systems and reducing corruption and red tape.

According to the ECA, more and more African governments are joining this cluster of reforming countries — placing a priority on poverty reduction in national development plans, investing more in health and education and adopting the economic and political policies necessary to attract greater aid and private

The Millennium Development Goals
To be achieved by 2015, from 1990 levels

1.	**Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**	Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than $1 a day and those who suffer from hunger.
2.	**Achieve universal primary education**	Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling.
3.	**Promote gender equality and empower women**	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.
4.	**Reduce child mortality**	Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five.
5.	**Improve maternal health**	Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio.
6.	**Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**	Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
7.	**Ensure environmental sustainability**	Integrate sustainable development principles into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources. Halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020.
8.	**Develop a global partnership for development**	Develop an open trading and financial system that is rules-based and non-discriminatory, and includes a global commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction. Address the least developed countries' special needs in trade, debt relief and for more generous aid. Address the special needs of landlocked and small island developing states. Address developing countries' debt problems through measures to make debt sustainable. In cooperation with developing countries, develop decent, productive work for youth. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries. In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies — especially information and communications technologies.

investment. The number of countries preparing formal poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) increased significantly last year, with nine countries finalizing their PRSPs in 2002, compared with four in 2001. Many countries have reduced their budget deficits and inflation rates to manageable levels and, according to the ECA, improved the domestic economic climate over two decades of often painful reform.

A billboard on HIV/AIDS in Arua, Uganda, which has dramatically reduced infection rates

The MDGs themselves have become part of the reform process. They have been incorporated into Africa's own development blueprint, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). A voluntary oversight body, the African Peer Review Mechanism, was launched in Abuja in May to monitor the continent's adherence to good political and economic governance.

The ECA also reports improvements in aid delivery and accountability. In Uganda, for example, bilateral donors are now channelling about half of the country's aid into budgetary support, instead of funding individual projects. This reform gives governments more flexibility in spending decisions, reduces time and paperwork, and helps to align donor programmes with national development priorities.

Tanzania and its development partners have established an independent body to monitor and evaluate aid delivery and effectiveness, while Ghana has inaugurated a donor code of conduct to improve coordination among its various aid partners. In February, representatives of major bilateral and multilateral donor agencies agreed to work with a group of African and other developing countries to develop criteria for more effective aid delivery and put in place mechanisms for mutual accountability and evaluation.

A few countries have begun to benefit from debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, releasing revenue to invest in development and enhancing prospects for future growth. One early HIPC beneficiary, Uganda, has invested its debt savings in universal primary education, while Mali, Mozambique and Senegal have announced plans to use funds freed from debt service to expand HIV prevention programmes. Regionally, reports the ECA, Africa's debt service as a percentage of annual revenue declined from 21 per cent in 1999 to 15 per cent last year, releasing an additional $2 bn for health, education and other pro-poor services.

Paltry partners

But overall, noted Mr. Annan, wealthy countries have yet to mobilize the resources needed to reach the MDGs. Forging the required "global partnership for development" between developing countries and the industrialized North is the eighth and final MDG, but here too the record is a mix of progress and setbacks. Under HIPC, for example, only 8 countries, including 7 in Africa, have actually had their debt reduced, well short of the target of 19 countries for 2003 set by the International Monetary Fund. In some of those cases, the amount to be written off was calculated on the basis of overly optimistic forecasts of future growth and has been insufficient to bring the debt burden down to "sustainable" levels, a problem made worse by the sharp drop in prices for Africa's commodity exports. Indeed, in

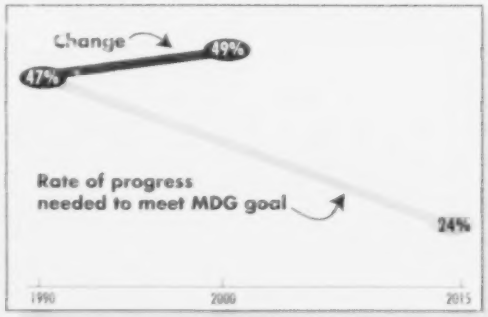
A dollar a day won't keep poverty away

As a way of communicating the depth of the suffering of the poor in developing countries to the citizens and policymakers of wealthy countries, few formulations are more effective than the $1 a day measurement of poverty. People who will never see or experience the grinding poverty of rural Zambia or urban Bangladesh can nevertheless imagine what it must be like for a family to live on what, in more fortunate countries, is the price of a morning newspaper.

But as an economic tool, says Mr. Jan Vandemoortele, the standard of $1 a day is flawed. An increase from 95 cents to $1.05 a day may make little real difference to a family, he noted, yet removes that family from the poverty count. "The short of it is a dollar a day doesn't keep poverty away." Moreover, "too many statistical errors slip in and the picture can get distorted" by rounding off statistics and averaging out income disparities. "These methodological problems are too great. It can't be fixed."

Far more accurate, he said, are country-specific household budget surveys that measure by direct observation the "basket" of goods and services needed by families for a minimum quality of life. Such surveys, by being closer to the ground, capture regional variations and more accurately reflect the real-world challenges facing the poor. This makes poverty difficult to compare across countries, he conceded, but provides much greater information to policymakers.

Proportion of population below $1 a day
(sub-Saharan Africa)



Source: UN Africa Recovery from UNDP data

some countries, lost export earnings have cost countries as much as they will save under HIPC, effectively cancelling the development benefits of debt reduction.

Official development assistance (ODA) finally reversed its worldwide decade-long slide in 2001, but has stablized only at about 1990 levels. Aid is expected to rise over the next two years on the strength of pledges by some donors, including the US, Canada and the EU, to provide an additional $16 bn in development assistance by 2006, with much of the increase earmarked for Africa. But the sluggish economic recovery and increased demands on domestic budgets in industrialized countries has already led some countries to retreat from their pledges. "That," Mr. Annan observed, "would be enormously damaging to prospects for meeting the MDGs."

If Africa and other developing regions are to make the kind of "general progress" needed on the MDGs, far greater resources will have to be generated from all sources — debt relief, ODA, foreign direct investment, trade, and domestic investment and savings. In the view of many economists, an additional $50 bn a year in development funds, about double the amount now available, would be required to reach the MDGs worldwide. Under current global economic and political conditions, however, said Mr. Vandemoortele, "we shouldn't hold our breath."

There is also a need to direct available ODA to the countries in greatest need. During the 1990s, he said, "the countries with the highest child mortality rates suffered the greatest drop in ODA. This is extremely worrisome." He also noted that the 23 countries with the highest HIV infection rates have suffered a 25 per cent decline in aid flows in recent years. "This is basically inadmissible. If the world is really serious about doing something to stop the epidemic, this is not the way to do it. . . . If we are not addressing the HIV pandemic in those countries, there is no way any of the MDG targets will be met."

"For the first time we have a global consensus on what development is all about. That's key."

— Mr. Jan Vandemoortele
head, UN Development Programme's poverty reduction group

The tendency of donor countries to reward successful countries with greater aid, he cautioned, can entrench poverty in less favoured places and sometimes ignores the culpability of Northern governments for crisis situations. "For many years we in the West too often supported regimes that didn't deserve it." In the Democratic Republic of Congo, he noted, Western support for the former Mobuto government had contributed to the current crisis. "We cannot now blame the Congolese for not being able to keep their house in order. That really is blaming the victim for the crime." While it was important to reduce waste and corruption in aid delivery, "we cannot walk away from those countries and those people by blaming them for a situation for which we [often] bear a great part of the responsibility."

There is little prospect for the private sector to make up the shortfall in ODA. Although Africa pays the highest rate of return on investments — four times higher than in Group of Seven countries and twice the average in Asia — flows of foreign direct investment to Africa declined by $6 bn in 2002 in response to the global recession and investor concerns about conflicts and political stability.

Africa's difficulty in attracting investment is reinforced by the world trading system, which has discouraged industrial development and depressed the prices for many of its commodity exports. "Germany would be a very different country if a Mercedes sold for $2,000 today instead of $50,000," Mr. Vandemoortele commented. "That is perhaps a fair comparison to what is happening in Africa." Since 1990, he continued, Africa has seen prices for many of its exports cut in half. "No economy can absorb such shocks. There is no way."

Although many of Africa's raw materials exports enter developed country markets under preferential terms, he continued, "if you process a product in Africa you will end up paying two, three or four times more in import duties than when you export raw materials for processing in the rich countries. This is a big disincentive to invest in Africa."

No silver bullet

The failure of the World Trade Organization meeting in Cancún in September is a further setback to Africa's development prospects, Mr. Vandemoortele told *Africa Recovery* (see page 3). But he emphasized that trade is not the engine of development. All the evidence, he said, suggests instead that "trade follows development. It is not a silver bullet." Improved terms of trade must be complimented by increased aid and deeper debt reductions if Africa is to make headway on the MDGs.

In the absence of those resources, he observed, African leaders have little choice but to prioritize individual MDGs and make progress where they can. "If we are serious about national ownership, let the Africans decide where to start. . . . We cannot impose global targets on each and every country regardless of circumstances." The importance of the MDGs, he concluded, lies not in the deadlines or even the specific development targets, but in their ability to mobilize resources and galvanize political and social action. "For the first time we have a global consensus on what development is all about. That's key." ■

Immunization campaign in Burkina Faso, which has succeeded in surpassing its own ambitious vaccination targets.

Africa builds its own peace forces

As big powers hold back, continent works to strengthen its capacities

from page 1

active and central role in trying to resolve the numerous conflicts that afflict their continent. They do so out of a growing sense of commitment that Africans must take the lead in resolving their own problems. At the annual summit meeting of the African Union (AU) in Maputo, Mozambique, in early July, Africa's heads of state expressed their "determination to address the scourge of conflicts in Africa in a collective, comprehensive and decisive manner," through the AU.

"Africa is coming of age in handling its own affairs," comments Prof. Maria Nzomo, head of the University of Nairobi's Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies. "There's a new sense that Africa ought to be refereeing its own disputes."

Yet Africans also are shouldering more of the burden through sheer necessity. The permanent members of the UN Security Council — which have the armies, equipment and financial resources to mount large-scale peacekeeping operations — appear very reluctant to become directly embroiled in African conflicts. Several thousand European and US troops are currently engaged in peace missions in Africa, but for the most part under their own ad hoc arrangements and for very specific assignments, not as part of comprehensive UN peacekeeping operations.

Meanwhile, the African Union and African sub-regional organizations "can play a variety of important roles" in African peacekeeping, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan last year told representatives of the South Africa-based civil society group, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). "They can help ensure that regional peace efforts are closely integrated with the approach of a [UN] peace operation," he said. They can also identify personnel for such operations and develop long-term peacebuilding strategies to stabilize African countries emerging from conflicts. And of course, they can build their own peacekeeping capacities.

However, with severely limited budgets and insufficient training, equipment and transport, Africa cannot quickly develop such capabilities on its own. As ACCORD Executive Director Vasu Gounden points out, there is a special need for strategic partnerships to develop between Africa and the international community "in peace and security, as in economic development and other spheres." In this context, partnership lies at the heart of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the continental strategy promoted by African leaders (see box, this page).

'Leave peacekeeping to others'

Since the early 1990s Africa has been swept by a proliferation of armed conflicts as many of the continent's established military and one-party regimes have been unable to fit the end of the Cold War, the growth of pro-democracy movements and the eruption of ethnic and other social tensions. From Somalia and Rwanda to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), hundreds of thousands have been killed outright and millions more have succumbed to war-created epidemics and starvation. All but a fraction of the victims have been civilian.

"Traditional" peacekeeping missions were not well suited to dealing with these kinds of conflicts, since they were generally set up to monitor peace agreements between established armies holding separate territories. Only the 1998-2000 border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea matched that model. Instead, most of Africa's recent conflicts have been civil wars or insurgencies, with multiple armed factions and grievances rooted in poverty and inequality. Even when peace accords have been painstakingly negotiated, not all political and military leaders have been able to fully control their followers. In some countries, local warlords who profited from the chaos of war saw little immediate advantage in laying down their arms.

The difficulties confronting international efforts in Africa were dramatically demonstrated by the losses suffered by US forces in Somalia in 1993, prompting that country's unilateral withdrawal. This seriously weakened the UN peacekeeping

NEPAD on peace and security

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), adopted by African leaders in 2001, places a strong emphasis on achieving the political conditions necessary to help sustain the continent's development. "African leaders," says NEPAD, "have learnt from their own experiences that peace, security, democracy, good governance, human rights and sound economic management are conditions for sustainable development. They are making a pledge to work, both individually and collectively, to promote these principles in their countries, sub-regions and the continent."

NEPAD recognizes not only that peace and security can create more favourable conditions for development, but also that greater development and reduced poverty can in turn make armed conflict less likely. "Long-term conditions for ensuring peace and security in Africa require policy measures to address the political and social vulnerabilities on which conflict is premised."

To build Africa's capacity to manage conflicts, it is vital to strengthen its continental and sub-regional institutions, especially in four key areas:

- the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts
- peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement
- post-conflict reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction
- combating the illicit proliferation of small arms, light weapons and landmines.

"African leaders are making a commitment to the African people and the world to work together in rebuilding the continent," NEPAD concludes. "It is a pledge to promote peace and stability, democracy, sound economic management and people-centred development and to hold each other accountable in terms of the agreements outlined in the programme."

Col Onwuamu Egbu Emeka of West African peacekeeping force getting an exuberant welcome in Monrovia, Liberia.

mission, which ultimately ended without restoring national political order. The "Somalia effect" – combined with the preoccupation of the US and other NATO powers with events in the Middle East and the Balkans – led to a marked decline in big-power participation in UN peacekeeping missions generally, but especially in Africa. When the genocide in Rwanda erupted in 1994, the small UN mission already there was far too weak to do anything to stop it.

At the start of 1991, eight of the top ten contributors to UN peacekeeping missions were developed countries. By the beginning of August 2003, one transitional country (Ukraine) was in the top ten. All the rest were from the developing world, including four African countries (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa). In the five UN peacekeeping missions then under way in Africa, troops, police and military observers from the Security Council's five permanent members comprised only 2 per cent of the total personnel.

The US government in recent years has explicitly redefined its global military role in a way that minimizes any direct peacekeeping responsibility. Secretary of State Colin Powell has told the US Congress that "it is often best to use American GIs for the heavy lifting of combat and leave the peacekeeping to others."

Africa's major former colonial powers have remained somewhat more active in the continent, notes Mr Jackie Cilliers, executive director of the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa. However, they "now intervene on their own terms, for limited durations, or where their (mis)vention is uncontroversial, cheap and largely symbolic."

As developed countries have pulled back from multilateral operations, African participation in UN peacekeeping has grown. Up to 1989, only a dozen African countries had ever contributed troops or police to UN missions. Since then, the total number that has provided peacekeepers to at least one UN mission has tripled.

At the beginning of September, 24 African states had nearly 10,000 nationals serving under the UN flag. They constituted 26 per cent of all UN peacekeepers worldwide. But nine-tenths of them were posted in Africa, where they made up 35 per cent of the five UN peacekeeping operations then under way in the continent (a sixth was subsequently established in Liberia). In the DRC, African troops constituted nearly half of the total.

A top priority for AU

As this participation in UN peacekeeping reflects, African leaders place a high value on such internationally authorized multilateral missions. They not only bring financial, material and logistical support, but also the political credibility of the UN flag. In African conflicts where neighbouring countries support or favour one side or another, the UN sometimes is perceived as more nonpartisan and therefore better able to bring the belligerents together.

At the same time, African leaders are emphasizing the need to build up the continent's own peace capacities. These include not only the ability to mount peacekeeping missions, but also to mediate political disputes before they erupt into war, broker peace talks in ongoing conflicts and better coordinate support for countries just emerging from war.

"Conflict resolution," South African President Thabo Mbeki told the July summit, "is a top priority for the [African] Union. As a consequence, conflicts that have been raging for many years are being tackled with increased determination and many African countries are committing their own resources to conflict prevention, management and resolution."

This was not always so. In the 1970s and 1980s, the AU's predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), engaged in several mediation efforts and even a couple of military missions (Chad and Zaire). But for the most part the OAU Charter's emphasis on national sovereignty and its prohibition against African states' interference in the internal affairs of other member states made such initiatives quite difficult. The non-interference clause, in particular, was "invoked as an excuse for inaction," comments Prof. Severine Rugumamu, of the organization's Conflict Management Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

By the early 1990s, as more conflicts erupted across the continent, such bottoms began to change. According to Mr Rugumamu, the idea of national sovereignty was gradually redefined. To some extent, it became less categorical by considering massive human rights violations and population displacements resulting from domestic conflicts as regional security threats. Simultaneously, the concept of "security" was broadened to include not just state security but also human security, a shift that "tends to augur well for multinational interventions conducted to arrest anarchy, restore order and protect innocent civilians."

In 1993, the OAU set up its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. It included a Central Organ capable of making decisions faster than most other OAU institu-

tions, and it had a separate fund of about $40 mn (about two-thirds provided by donor countries) to quickly finance mediation and observer missions. It sent emissaries to try to mediate disputes in a number of African countries and mounted five small military observer missions (Rwanda, Burundi, Comoros, DRC and the Ethiopia-Eritrea border), most lasting two-to-three years. The OAU's efforts were particularly fruitful in the Ethiopia-Eritrea war, and paved the way for the UN peacekeeping mission established in 2000.

A Kenyan soldier in the UN peacekeeping mission on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border.

With the transformation of the OAU into the AU, conflict resolution and security have taken on an even higher priority. The AU's Constitutive Act explicitly gives the organization the authority to "intervene in cases of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity." Among the AU's new institutions will be a 15-member Peace and Security Council, which President Mbeki has called "a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient responses to conflicts and crisis situations in Africa."

Meanwhile, the AU's development strategy, NEPAD, has spurred the establishment of a new African Peer Review Mechanism. It is designed to promote good governance within African countries, seen as one of the best ways to prevent domestic political conflicts from leading to coups, insurgency or civil war.

Spotlight on Burundi

One of the first tests of the commitment of the AU — and of Africa's external partners — will be in Burundi. The AU's most recent undertaking builds on the OAU's earlier experience there, including intensive mediation efforts by two former African presidents, the late Mr. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Mr. Nelson Mandela of South Africa, which eventually yielded a ceasefire agreement between the government and several major rebel groups, although some fighting has continued. In January 2003, the AU authorized the dispatch of a small military observer mission to monitor the ceasefire.

A month later, an extraordinary AU summit decided to approve a larger peacekeeping mission, the African Mission in Burundi (AMIB). By August, about a third of the authorized force of 3,500 troops had been deployed to Burundi, largely from South Africa. Because of financial constraints, the dispatch of the remaining troops from Ethiopia and Mozambique was delayed.

"It would be a tragedy," Mozambique's UN Ambassador Filipe Chidumo informed the Security Council, "if the international community were to miss this window of opportunity..." If the AU mission's financial and logistical constraints are not addressed, he warned, that shortfall would "have the potential to undermine both the effectiveness of the mission and the prospects for achieving lasting peace in Burundi."

By early September, with financial support from South Africa, the US, UK and France, Mozambique finally was able to send a contingent of nearly 230 troops. Noting Mozambique's own efforts to consolidate peace after the end of a long civil war in the early 1990s, President Joaquim Chissano said, "Conflicts, particularly violent conflicts between and within states in other parts of Africa, and in the world in general, are also a danger to our peace and tranquillity. Helping other peoples keep and maintain peace is also a way of defending our own peace."

ECOWAS transformed

So far, most African-led peace missions have been spearheaded not by the OAU/AU, but by one of the continent's several sub-regional organizations. Since some of Africa's most intractable wars spill across the borders of neighbouring countries — as in the Great Lakes region or the Mano River countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea — this kind of engagement is particularly appropriate for dealing with the conflicts on a regional level.

One of the first such efforts was a Nigerian-led military mission to Liberia at the start of that country's civil war in 1990. Authorized by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the force remained for six years, but had great difficulty containing the conflict, which displaced more than half the country's population. With support from the UN, ECOWAS eventually promoted a peace plan that led to elections in 1997, won by the strongest of the warlords, Mr. Charles Taylor.

The ad hoc character of that intervention, combined with some missteps by the ECOWAS forces, spurred the organization to systematize and strengthen its overall approach. In 1993, ECOWAS revised its founding treaty to shift from a virtually exclusive focus on economic integration to the inclusion of peace and security issues. At the end of the decade, ECOWAS went a step further to create a new Mediation and Security Council, with the authority to authorize military deployment by a two-thirds vote. Beyond peacekeeping, the regional group also has devoted considerable attention to related security issues, such as combating the recruitment of child soldiers and the proliferation of illegal small arms.

As these changes were under way, ECOWAS dispatched a new peacekeeping force to Sierra Leone. That country was afflicted by

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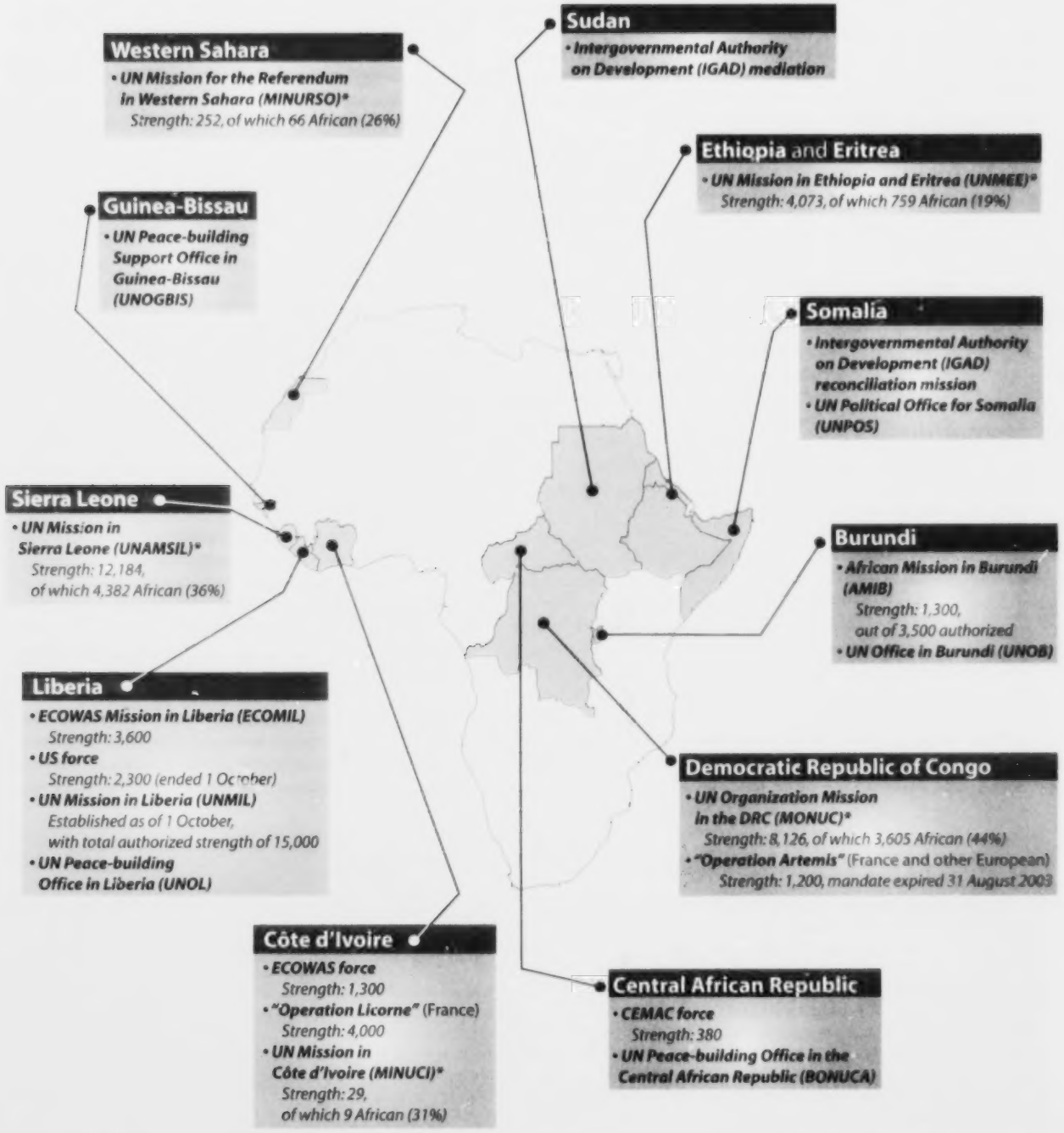
African and UN peace missions


Western Sahara
• UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)*
Strength: 252, of which 66 African (26%)
Sudan
• Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) mediation
Ethiopia and Eritrea
• UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)*
Strength: 4,073, of which 759 African (19%)
Guinea-Bissau
• UN Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS)
Somalia
• Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) reconciliation mission
• UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS)
Sierra Leone
• UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)*
Strength: 12,184, of which 4,382 African (36%)
Burundi
• African Mission in Burundi (AMIB)
Strength: 1,300, out of 3,500 authorized
• UN Office in Burundi (UNOB)
Liberia
• ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL)
Strength: 3,600
• US force
Strength: 2,300 (ended 1 October)
• UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)
Established as of 1 October, with total authorized strength of 15,000
• UN Peace-building Office in Liberia (UNOL)
Democratic Republic of Congo
• UN Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC)*
Strength: 8,126, of which 3,605 African (44%)
• "Operation Artemis" (France and other European)
Strength: 1,200, mandate expired 31 August 2003
Côte d'Ivoire
• ECOWAS force
Strength: 1,300
• "Operation Licorne" (France)
Strength: 4,000
• UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI)*
Strength: 29, of which 9 African (31%)
Central African Republic
• CEMAC force
Strength: 380
• UN Peace-building Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA)

Sources: UN Africa Recovery from various sources.

* Data on UN peacekeeping missions as of 31 August 2003, from UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

a brutal insurgency by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), supported by Mr Taylor in neighbouring Liberia, and in 1997 suffered a military coup. The West Africa force, which arrived that year, pressed the military junta for the restoration of the elected government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. When the junta refused, the ECOWAS troops overthrew it and reinstated the ousted president in March 1998.

"Africa is coming of age in handling its own affairs. There's a new sense that Africa ought to be refereeing its own disputes."

Prof. Maria Nzomo, head of the University of Nairobi's Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies

The following year, the Security Council established the UN Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Most West African contingents were eventually absorbed into UNAMSIL, and the ECOWAS mandate ended in 2000. By early 2002 the UN mission succeeded in essentially ending the war: the disarmament of tens of thousands of former fighters, new elections (again won by Mr. Kabbah) and the first steps towards post-war recovery.

ECOWAS mounted a third peacekeeping force in 1998-99, following a brief civil war in Guinea-Bissau. Then after the outbreak of war in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002 it authorized a mission there, by June 2003 reaching more than 1,300 troops. Working in conjunction with a small UN political and military liaison mission and a larger French force, this ECOWAS operation is helping to monitor compliance with a peace agreement between the Ivorian government and rebel forces.

'Fast track'

And now ECOWAS is simultaneously fielding a force in Liberia. The intervention responded to a sharp deterioration in the situation in July, as rebels converged on the capital prior to Mr. Taylor's resignation and departure from the country the following month. Rather than waiting to outfit and transport fresh ECOWAS units, Nigeria agreed to re-route to Monrovia a national contingent that was set to return home from Sierra Leone. This placed some peacekeepers on the ground at a critical time, as the larger West African force was still being assembled.

The relatively quick action in Liberia reflects Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's vision of a "two-track policy" for ECOWAS. When a few member states are ready, he says, they should act right away. Other countries that require more time will move later. "Nigeria intends to join the fast track." Given the size and experience of the Nigerian armed forces and the government's ability to devote relatively significant funding to regional conflict resolution initiatives, this commitment is an important asset for ECOWAS as a whole.

Insufficient resources remain a problem for the group, however. In August, Mr. Annan alerted the Security Council that the ECOWAS force in Côte d'Ivoire was facing "financial difficulties" that could potentially hamper its efforts to oversee ex-combatants' disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. He urged the international community to assist ECOWAS "on an urgent basis."

From Bangui to Maseru

Other regional organizations also have been taking initiatives in conflict resolution and peacekeeping. There currently are around 380 troops from Gabon, Republic of Congo and Chad in the Central African Republic, under the auspices of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC). Some contingents arrived in November 2002, as the government of President Ange-Félix Patassé was facing armed opposition from his former army commander, General François Bozizé. The CEMAC troops, however, were too few to prevent General Bozizé from seizing power in March 2003. In the chaotic situation now facing the country, its mandate has been limited to controlling looting and other violence around the capital, Bangui.

In East Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) underwent a transformation similar to that of ECOWAS. Originally devoted almost entirely to economic development and combating drought, the seven-country group became increasingly involved in conflict resolution in the early 1990s.

In Sudan, IGAD has taken the lead in mediating between the government and rebel forces in the south. Although under way for more than a decade, these efforts have made greater progress since late 2002, with the opening of direct talks between the protagonists. In late September, the Sudanese government and the

'Window of opportunity' in Liberia

The signing of a comprehensive Liberian peace agreement and the establishment of a transitional government in Monrovia offer a "window of opportunity to end the suffering inflicted on the people of Liberia," UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the Security Council on 11 September. It also provides a chance "to find a peaceful solution to a conflict that has been the epicentre of instability" in West Africa.

On 19 September, the Council seized that opportunity by authorizing the creation of a new peacekeeping mission. To be known as the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), it will include some 15,000 troops plus more than a thousand police and several hundred civilian staff and military observers.

In part, such a large force is required because of the multiple mandates expected of it, including monitoring the ceasefire, protecting civilians, ensuring that humanitarian assistance can reach those who need it, assisting the new transitional government to extend its authority throughout the country, overseeing the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, helping rebuild a professional police force and judicial system, and ultimately facilitating free and fair elections, tentatively set for October 2005.

A sizeable force, with strong enforcement powers, also is needed because of the country's extremely unsettled political landscape. In addition to the regular army and militias set up by the ex-president, there are two rebel movements and numerous local warlords and armed bands, some of them operating beyond anyone's direction. "The civilian population is being exploited and terrified by thugs who frighten them and then loot and steal," the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Liberia Jacques Klein remarked at an early September news

rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed a security agreement that could help pave the way towards an overall political settlement.

IGAD also has been busy trying to broker talks among the various factions in Somalia, which still lacks an authoritative, nationally recognized government in Mogadishu. An IGAD envoy, Mr. Bethuel Kiplagat of Kenya, is working with the UN and others to broaden participation by various Somali groups in a new round of reconciliation talks currently taking place in Mbagathi, Kenya.

In 1998, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) authorized troops from South Africa and Botswana to restore order in Maseru, the capital of Lesotho. This followed a highly contested election, an upsurge of popular protests and a coup attempt. Although scores of lives were lost, including a dozen South African soldiers, the situation was soon contained, and eventually new elections were held in May 2002.

The complex war in the DRC — itself a member of SADC — has drawn in various neighbouring countries, exposing political divisions within the regional organization over how to react. Three countries (Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe) initially sent military forces to support the government in Kinshasa, and received formal SADC approval after their troops were already there (those forces have since been withdrawn).

Other SADC members judged that the best response was to mediate among the government, the rebels and the neighbouring countries (Rwanda and Uganda) supporting the rebels. Retired Botswana President Sir Ketumile Masire has functioned as the main mediator, with Zambia and South Africa also playing important roles. In April 2003, virtually all parties to the conflict came to peace talks in Sun City, South Africa, and concluded an agreement that led to a coalition transitional government.

South African role

By far, South Africa is the biggest economic and military power within SADC, and its approach to conflict resolution will heavily influence the broader regional group. But South Africa is a relatively recent participant in African peacekeeping efforts. Before the end of apartheid and the first democratic election in 1994, the country was itself a major instigator of wars — in Angola, Mozambique and other neighbouring countries. After the institution of majority rule, the new government, preoccupied with carrying out sweeping domestic reform, was reluctant to commit itself to costly and time-consuming foreign entanglements.

By the late 1990s, however, South African leaders began to recognize the need to engage more actively in conflict resolution elsewhere in Africa. As Mr. Jackie Selebi, a former director in the Department of Foreign Affairs, put it, "We cannot talk of an African renaissance, or even achieve a better life for people in South Africa, if around us countries are in conflict. . . . If Africa disintegrates, there will be no South Africa."

South African troops, part of an African Union peacekeeping force in Burundi, chat with with local market vendors.

conference in Monrovia.

Both Mr. Klein and the Secretary-General praised the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for dispatching troops to Liberia before the UN mission could be created. Crediting the Nigerian leader in particular, Mr. Klein said, "President Obasanjo has done miracles in Liberia, both in driving the peace process . . . and then in providing troops."

In his report to the Security Council, Mr. Annan drew attention to the importance of not only disarming and demobilizing the many fighters in Liberia, but also in giving them a stake in the country's future. "Unless we address early and effectively enough the reintegration problem, the thousands of disarmed youth, in a dire economic situation, will return to the bush and become hired guns, not only inside the country but also in a sub-region already awash with small arms and mercenaries." He therefore proposed that funding for UNMIL's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration tasks come not only from voluntary contributions, which tend to be unpredictable, but also from the UN's assessed peacekeeping budget. The Security Council resolution authorizing the creation of UNMIL did not take up this suggestion, but called on the international donor community to provide resources for such purposes.

The first peacekeeping troops of UNMIL will come from the ECOWAS contingents already on the ground in Liberia. Beginning in November, contingents from other countries will arrive in stages until the mission reaches its full strength by March 2004. Parallel to this military deployment, donor countries have been encouraged to hold a pledging conference, hopefully by the end of the year, to commit resources for the rehabilitation of Liberia's shattered economy and society.

In 2001, South Africa committed its first 100 or so military officers to the DRC to serve as part of the UN peacekeeping mission. It currently has 1,400 troops there, in addition to the more than 1,000 South African troops in Burundi under the auspices of the AU.

But there are limits to South Africa's capacities. Its military was restructured relatively recently, in the 1990s, and not very many units have extensive peacekeeping training. Moreover, as part of South Africa's domestic reforms, the defence budget has been drastically reduced, so that it now stands at only around 1.5 per cent of gross national product, compared with 4 per cent in 1990.

Multiple partners

Larger African countries such as Nigeria and South Africa are able to mount modest peacekeeping activities in a few countries, but not the kind of sustained, large-scale operations required by the continent's more complex conflicts and humanitarian emergencies. For that, Africa needs to be able to draw on the financial resources, equipment, logistical support — and troops — of its external partners.

Ideally, as African leaders often insist, this should come under the auspices of a UN peacekeeping mission. The ECOWAS force in Liberia, for example, was able to arrive quickly and managed to help restore a semblance of order to Monrovia. But to extend that security throughout the country and to help implement the extensive provisions of the Liberian peace agreement, a larger and more robust UN mission is being put together (see box, pages 18-19). The West African troops already in Liberia will then "be blue helmeted and become UN peacekeepers," the Secretary-General's special representative for Liberia, Mr. Jacques Klein, commented in Monrovia on 5 September.

As in Sierra Leone and the DRC, many of the non-African troops in the Liberia peacekeeping mission will most likely come from other parts of the developing world. But even though the major powers are less willing than a decade ago to commit large numbers of troops to UN operations, there still are possibilities for limited, specific interventions in some countries, alongside the UN or an African force. Africa has seen several examples of this in recent years:

- The UK's dispatch of more than 1,000 troops to Sierra Leone in 2000.
- France's "Operation Licorne," involving 4,000 troops in Côte d'Ivoire.
- A French-led multinational European force of 1,200 troops in the city of Bunia in the DRC.
- The posting of 2,300 US marines off the Liberian coast during August-September 2003.

In some cases, such forces played crucial military roles. The British contingent in Sierra Leone, for example, held off rebel forces at a critical time while the UN peacekeeping mission was still building up its strength. The European force in Bunia helped reduce ethnic fighting around that town before formally handing authority back to the UN's broader DRC peacekeeping mission on 1 September. Even when such forces do not directly confront belligerents, their very presence has given greater credibility to other peacekeeping forces and encouraged the various sides to negotiate more seriously.

According to Mr. Alex de Waal, director of Justice Africa, a London-based non-governmental organization active in human rights and peace issues, these kinds of partnerships represent the emergence of a form of pragmatic "ad hoc multilateralism" in Africa. They involve the US, European powers, UN and African peacekeepers, "each playing different but complementary roles."

Meanwhile, the US, France, UK and other countries are also providing peacekeeping training to dozens of African armies, to improve their skills and coordination for either UN or African-led missions. The industrialized countries' Group of Eight agreed at their June summit meeting in Evian, France, to help finance the creation, training and equipping of African standby brigades by 2010, under the direction of the AU and African regional organizations.

To some extent, such efforts respond to the concerns expressed by African leaders at the AU summit in Maputo. They acknowledged that the "lack of resources to implement African initiatives" means that efforts to resolve conflicts on the continent will require more than African determination and resolve. They also will need "the full support of the wider international community." ■

Swift mediation in Guinea-Bissau

Just four days after the 14 September military coup in Guinea-Bissau, a number of West African leaders rushed in person to that troubled country to press for political reconciliation and a timetable for a return to elected civilian rule. President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and President John Kufuor of Ghana, along with Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Executive Secretary Mohamed Ibn Chambas, sought to persuade both the former president and the military officers to avert an open confrontation. The country's political situation has remained very unsettled since the end of a civil war in 1998, which ruined much of the capital, Bissau.

"We have come to give advice," President Wade said during his visit to Bissau. "We have not come to give instructions." Noting that political and economic life in Guinea-Bissau has been deteriorating seriously for months prior to the military takeover, Mr. Wade explained that the West African delegation had dissuaded the ousted president, Mr. Kumba Yalla, from insisting on his restoration to power, since that might very well worsen the conflict. Mr. Yalla agreed, and resigned from the presidency.

President Obasanjo, speaking "as a former soldier," addressed the military officers, led by General Verissimo Seabre Correia: "The crisis in this country is deep. You have to help yourselves. Your problem is political and economic. If we do nothing to establish a government that strives for national unity . . . this country will continue to decline and will bring shame on everyone."

In response, the officers agreed to the establishment of a transitional government headed by a nonpartisan civilian prime minister and including "all national political orientations." They initiated consultations with Guinea-Bissau's numerous political parties to identify an interim president acceptable to all sides — Mr. Henrique Rosâ, former head of the National Electoral Commission. One of his government's main tasks will be to work out the processes and timetable for the preparation of new elections.

'Bold action' needed to realize African plan

Annan urges greater African and donor support for NEPAD

With the active engagement of both Africa and its external supporters, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is building an "incipient momentum," UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan reports. Despite this promising start, "bold actions are required on the part of all stakeholders" to overcome the serious challenges and constraints that may impede NEPAD's effective implementation.

The New Partnership, the broad strategy of African leaders for their continent's development, emphasizes that economic and social development, peace and democracy are all essential for Africa's advancement. Since its adoption more than two years ago, NEPAD has been welcomed by the Group of Eight industrialized countries and was endorsed in November 2002 by the UN General Assembly as the main framework for international cooperation with Africa. Mr. Annan's 7 August report to the General Assembly is his first on progress in implementing the New Partnership.

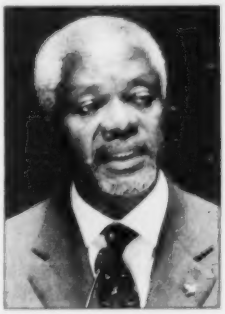
African responsibility

Africa's ownership and leadership of NEPAD represents "an important and welcome reassertion of the principle of responsibility for its development," Mr. Annan says. Accordingly, the first part of his report highlights the actions that Africa itself has taken to advance NEPAD's ambitious goals.

On the political front, one of the most "innovative" achievements has been the creation of the African Peer Review Mechanism. It is a voluntary process by which participating countries agree to monitor, review and learn from each other's experiences in promoting good political and corporate governance, sound economic management and respect for human rights. As of July, 16 African countries had acceded to the Mechanism and a panel of eminent persons has been appointed to run it. It is expected that reviews of four participating countries will begin before the end of the year.

Steps also are being taken on a number of NEPAD's economic and social priorities, including:

- The elaboration of a comprehensive African agricultural development plan, which will form the basis for concrete projects in specific countries and regions.
- The preparation of a NEPAD health programme, which reaffirms African countries' commitment to allocate at least 15 per cent of their budgets to health and calls on Africa's external partners to contribute $22 bn annually.
- A NEPAD education programme that "fast tracks" expansion of primary education.
- Measures to develop Africa's roads, railways and energy and communications networks; promote tourism and industrialization; and protect the environment.



Kofi Annan: African ownership is key

Mr. Annan, however, also cites some constraints within Africa to the implementation of the New Partnership. These include weak links between African regional economic groupings and the NEPAD Implementation Committee, limited institutional capacities to plan and implement development programmes, insufficient efforts to popularize NEPAD within Africa and inadequate funding by African governments.

International support

Official development assistance to Africa had declined throughout the 1990s, falling from a total of $26.6 bn in 1990 to $16.4 bn in 2000. Since then, it has begun to recover, rising to $17.8 bn in 2001 and $18.6 bn the following year. But, Mr. Annan adds, even those higher aid levels will not be enough for Africa to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

By April 2003, seven African countries had significant portions of their external debts cancelled under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC), and another 15 were beginning to receive interim assistance. A cumulative total of $32.3 bn has been committed to these countries. However, there have been delays in reaching full cancellation for a number of countries, while some of those that already benefited from cancellation "have witnessed deterioration in their debt indicators," Mr. Annan reports. This was largely because of a decline in their export earnings, due to volatile commodity prices.

There has been some limited progress in international policy on trade, Mr. Annan reports. Nevertheless, there has been "lack of progress" on issues of particular concern to Africa within the World Trade Organization, including market access and Northern agricultural subsidies. Total aid to Africa, the Secretary-General observes, "is modest in comparison with the huge agricultural subsidies paid to farmers in the developed countries." Those subsidies, he explains, "depress commodity prices, hindering Africa's ability to increase exports and escape from poverty and dependence on aid."

Coordination

Mr. Annan also highlights examples of the UN system's support for the New Partnership. These include the UN Development Programme's financial assistance to the NEPAD Secretariat, the Economic Commission for Africa's work on codes and standards for the African Peer Review Mechanism and the World Food Programme's school-feeding programmes in 35 African countries.

In May 2003, the new Office of the Special Adviser for Africa was officially established at UN headquarters in New York, with the responsibility for coordinating global advocacy in support of NEPAD and helping promote a coordinated system-wide response. Mr. Annan notes that bringing greater coherence and coordination to the work of the various UN agencies remains "by far the most important challenge" constraining the organization's support for the New Partnership.

Mr. Annan concludes with a number of recommendations. African countries will need to take further steps to integrate NEPAD priorities into their development plans, and to ensure adequate funding for them. The continent's partners, meanwhile, should "strive to achieve coherence and complementarity in their trade and aid policies," so that one does not undercut the other. The private sector and civil society also should be encouraged to adopt a "proactive orientation" towards the New Partnership, with African governments expected to do more to facilitate their involvement. ■

AFRICA AGENDA

4-5 November 2003, Stavanger (Norway) — Conference on Water for the Poorest. Tel (47-22) 42-81-00, fax (47-22) 42-81-06, e-mail <thewateracademy@thewateracademy.org>, website <http://www.thewateracademy.org/stavanger.inforpage.html>.

6-7 November 2003, Johannesburg (South Africa) — NEPAD Ministerial Conference (Science and Technology for Development). Contact Dr. John Mugabe, tel (27-12) 841-3688, fax (27-12) 841-4414.

9-11 November 2003, Hangzhou (China) — International Conference on Estuaries and Coasts. Contact Secretariat, Zhejiang Institute of Hydraulics and Estuary, tel/fax (86-571) 8643-8009, website <www.irtces.org/isshhu/icec/index.htm>.

9-22 November 2003, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) — Saving Lives and Livelihoods: Managing Fundamental Interventions in Complex Emergencies. A Course for Managers of Humanitarian Operations. Tel (617) 627-3423, fax (617) 627-3428, e-mail <estrella.alves@tufts.edu>, website <http://www.famine.tufts.edu>.

12-14 November 2003, Paris (France) — Global Conference on Oceans, Coasts and Islands. Contact Center for Study of Marine Policy, University of Delaware, tel (302) 831-8086, fax (302) 831-3668, e-mail <johnston@udel.edu>, website <http://www.icm.noaa.gov>.

28-30 November 2003, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) — NEPAD After Durban: Civil Society Organizations and the Way Forward. Contact ECA, tel (251-1) 51-7200, fax (251-1) 51-4416, e-mail <ecainfo@uneca.org>.

1-3 December 2003, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) — International conference on "The African Union and New Strategies for Development in Africa," organized by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the Development Policy Management Forum. Contact Martha Kebede, fax (251-1) 51-5410, e-mail <dpmf@uneca.org> or Virginie Ntang, fax (221) 824-1289, e-mail <virginie.ntang@codesria.sn>.

2-5 December 2003, Niamey (Niger) — Sustainable Dryland Agriculture Systems conference. Contact Arnie Schlissel, IPALAC, fax (972) 647-2984, e-mail <ipalac@bgumail.bgu.ac.il>.

5-6 December 2003, Berlin (Germany) — Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change. Contact Bianca Barth, e-mail <BC2003@zedat.fu-berlin.de>, website <http://www.fuberlin.de/ffu/akumwelt/bc2003>.

8-11 December 2003, Abuja (Nigeria) — International Conference on the Mano River Union. Contact ECA tel (251-1) 51-7200, fax (251-1) 51-4416, e-mail <ecainfo@uneca.org>.

10-12 December 2003, Geneva (Switzerland) — World Summit on the Information Society. Tel (41-22) 730-6304, fax (41-22) 730-6393, e-mail <info@geneva2003.org>, website <http://www.itu.int/wsis>.

8-13 December 2003, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) — The Pan-African Implementation and Partnership Conference on Water. Tel (251-1) 44-3422, fax (251-1) 51-4416, e-mail <donkor@un.org> or <sdonkor@uneca.org>.

22 December 2003 – 3 January 2004, Freetown (Sierra Leone) — First Global African Youth Assembly. Contact 21st Century African Youth Movement, tel (608) 274-8542, fax (253) 540-3282, e-mail <African2000@writeme.com>.

WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE

26-30 October, Kampala (Uganda) — 11th International Conference for People Living with HIV/AIDS. Tel (31-20) 423-4114, fax (31-20) 423-4224, e-mail <infognp@gnpplus.net>.

29-31 October 2003, Tunis (Tunisia) — UNCTAD, Panel Meeting on Promoting the Application of Science and Technology to Meet the Development Goals Contained in the Millennium Declaration. Contact Mongi Hamdi, tel (41-22) 917-5069, fax (41-22) 917-0122, e-mail <mongi.hamdi@unctad.org> or <stdev@unctad.org>.

30 October - 2 November 2003, Boston, MA (USA) — Youthful Africa in the 21st Century, 46th Annual Meeting. Contact Africa Studies Association, tel (732) 932-8173, fax (732) 932-3394, e-mail <callASA@rci.rutgers.edu>.

AFRICA BOOKS

Promises Not Kept: Poverty and the Betrayal of Third World Development by John Isbister (Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, CT, 2003; 288 pp; pb $23.95)

Le Burundi contemporain. L'Etat-nation en question (1956-2002) by Augustin Nsanze (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2003; 516 pp; €43 FF282).

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Trade, Environment and the Millennium (United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan, 2002; 464 pp; $26.95)

From Conflict to Recovery in Africa, ed. Tony Addison (UNU/Wider Studies in Development Economics, 2003; 296 pp; £50.00; $74.00)

Médias et l'état au Sénégal. L'impossible autonomie by Ndiaga Loum (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2003; 266 pp; €22, FF144).

We Are Also Human Beings! A Guide to Children's Rights in Zimbabwe (UNICEF, New York, NY, 2002; 224pp; $9.95)

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Taming the Sahara: Tunisia Shows a Way While Others Falter by Andrew Borowiec (Praeger, Westport, CT, 2003; 168 pp; hb $67.95)

Kadogo. Enfants des guerres d'Afrique centrale Soudan, Ouganda, Rwanda, R-D Congo by Hervé Cheuzeville (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2003; 312 pp; €26, FF171).

African Savannas: Global Narratives and Local Knowledge of Environmental Change, eds. Thomas J. Bassett, Donald Crummey (Praeger, Westport, CT, 2003; 264 pp; hb $74.95; pb $27.95)

Financial Stability and Growth in Emerging Economies: The Role of the Financial Sector, eds. Jan Joost Teunissen, Mark Teunissen (Forum on Debt and Development, The Hague, Netherlands, 2003; 278 pp; €24.50)

The Role of Religion in African Civil Wars, ed. Neil Kastfelt (Hurst & Co., London, UK, 2003; 288 pp; pb £16.95, hb £39.50)

Qui a fait tuer Amilcar Cabral? by José Pedro Castanheira (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2003; 270 pp; €22, FF144)

Knowledge for Development? Comparing British, Japanese, Swedish and World Bank Aid by Kenneth King and Simon McGrath (Zed Books, London, UK, 2003; hb £49.95, $65; pb £14.95, $22.50)

African Development and Governance Strategies in the 21st Century: Looking Back to Move Forward: Essays in Honour of Adebayo Adedeji at Seventy, eds. Bade Onimode et al (Zed Books, London, UK, 2003; hb £50, $75; pb £16.95, $25)

Ghana — Long Term Growth, Atrophy and Stunted Recovery by J. Clark Leith and Ludvig Söderling (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, Sweden, 2003; 111 pp; SEK100, £7.95, $12.95)

The New Regionalism in Africa, eds. J. Andrew Grant and Fredrick Soderbaum (Ashgate Publishers, Hampshire, UK, 2003; 268 pp; hb $89.95; £49.95)

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Restarting and Sustaining Economic Growth and Development in Africa: The Case of Kenya by Mwangi S. Kimenyi et al (Ashgate Publishers, Hampshire, UK, 2003; 312 pp; hb $89.95; £49.95)

The Political Economy of Post-Adjustment: Toward New Theories and Strategies of Development by Hakim Ben Hammouda, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Senegal (Ashgate Publishers, Hampshire, UK, 2003; 236 pp; hb $89.95; £50.00)

Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime by Elinor Sisulu (New Africa Books, Cape Town, South Africa, 2003; 680 pp; pb R75)

Adventure Capitalism: Globalization and the Political Economy of Stock Markets in Africa by Todd Moss (Ashgate Publishers, Hampshire, UK, 2003; 224 pp; hb £52.50)

The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia and Latin America 1500-1960, eds. Steven Topik & William Clarence-Smith (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2003; 350pp; hb £40.00)

Challenging Foreign Aid: A Policymaker's Guide to the Millennium Challenge Account by Steven Radelet (Institute for International Economics, Washington, DC, 2003; 212 pp; pb $20)

AFRICA IN BRIEF

NEPAD bodies to merge into African Union

African leaders have approved a three-year timetable for integration of the institutions of the continent's development blueprint into the governing and administrative structures of the African Union. They originally adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2001, but with the old Organization of African Unity in the process of transition to the AU, the institutions set up to promote the plan have remained distinct, linked to the AU only on an ad hoc basis.

Leaders at summit in Mozambique

Meeting in Mozambique at the second AU summit in July, African heads of state and government authorized the chairman of the Union's Commission, former Malian president Alpha Oumar Konaré, to secure agreement with South Africa, which hosts the NEPAD Secretariat, to designate the body as an external AU office for a transitional period ending in July 2006. The decision is intended to give the new pan-African political organization, headquartered in Addis Ababa, time to become fully operational.

In the interim, the NEPAD Secretariat will continue to operate under the direction of the Implementation Committee, composed of 20 African heads of state and government. These NEPAD bodies and the AU will continue to develop working relationships and lay the groundwork for full integration. This will include harmonizing policies and developing a sustainable funding mechanism for NEPAD after 2006. Toward that end, the AU has urged member states and the international community to step up financial support for NEPAD. ■

HIV spreading rapidly among young people

HIV/AIDS is spreading most rapidly among young people in sub-Saharan Africa, notes the UN Population Fund's (UNFPA) *State of World Population, 2003*. The report, released in October, finds that 6,000 youths aged 15-24 are becoming infected every day across the world, constituting half of all new infections. In sub-Saharan Africa, the report observes, an estimated 8.6 million young people (67 per cent female) are now infected, followed by South Asia with 1.1 million infections.

Poverty, gender inequality, insufficient funding for programmes and a severe lack of information and services for prevention are the main reasons for the spread, UNFPA reports. As a result, many young people are unable to avoid unwanted pregnancy, unsafe childbirth and sexually transmitted infections.

"There is a critical need for more education and increased access to youth-friendly reproductive health services," says UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid.

In 2001, international assistance for reproductive health programmes was $2.5 bn, just 44 per cent of the required annual amount agreed to at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. "Governments need to do more in order to meet their international development goals and commitments to young people," commented Ms. Obaid. ■

Finally, WTO agrees on access to generic medicines

In late August, members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) finally broke a two-year standoff over intellectual property protection and public health, agreeing to allow the export of generic drugs. Described by WTO Director-General Supachai Panitchpakdi as "historic," the decision grants countries permission to make generic versions of patented drugs and sell them to countries facing national health emergencies but unable to produce their own.

At a 2001 ministerial meeting of the WTO in Doha, Qatar, the organization agreed to amend existing intellectual property rules that permitted drug patents to be overridden only in cases of national emergency, allowing countries to make generic drugs, but only for domestic consumption. Developing countries argued that the rules did not make it possible for them to import cheap generic drugs produced by other countries, such as Brazil, especially for the fight against AIDS.

Under the new provision, both the importing and exporting country must issue compulsory licences overriding patents on the relevant drug. The WTO will manage the system, receiving information on intended use and details on product type, quantities and licensees. The provision specifies that such drugs can only be produced for public, non-commercial use. "While we welcome the recent agreement, we remain nonetheless concerned that it should have taken so long to reach an agreement on such a fundamentally humanitarian issue," says Trade Minister Jaya Cuttaree of Mauritius. "It is a delay that Africa paid for through the loss of numerous human lives."

Non-governmental organizations such as Medecins sans Frontière say it is too early to celebrate, since the provision's conditions remain onerous. For instance, the issuing of compulsory licences will restrict the size of the market by specifying the quantities to be produced and the specific market for which they are being made. This, notes the non-governmental group ActionAid, limits the number of producers and traders in that market. That, in turn, limits competition, which is essential if the very high market prices of AIDS drugs are to fall. "The small size of individual markets would make any one market unattractive for a firm to enter into production of generic drugs." ■

African slums on the rise

If no serious action is taken, the world's 1 billion slum dwellers will likely double in number within 30 years, predicts the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat). The agency's report, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003*, notes that while slums exist in all parts of the world, they are concentrated in developing countries. An estimated 50 per cent of slum dwellers are in South-Central and Eastern Asia, 14 per cent in Latin America and 17 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.

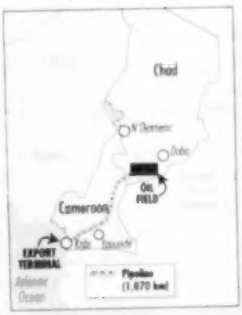
"The proportion in Africa is rising rapidly as populations increase and urban housing shortages continue, while it is falling in Latin America due to regularization and slum improvement," the study notes. The average proportion of city dwellers living in slums in developing countries is 43 per cent, UN Habitat reports, but for sub-Saharan Africa the proportion is "an alarming 72 per cent." Slums often lack basic services such as water and sanitation, have inadequate and unsafe building structures and are overcrowded. The report urges local and national governments and the international community to take action against poverty, the underlying cause of slum proliferation. ■

AFRICA WATCH

CHAD-CAMEROON

Oil pipeline opens for business

Chad formally joined the ranks of oil-producing countries on 10 October. That day marked the official inauguration of a $3.7 bn petroleum mining and pipeline project that links some 300 wells in the Chadian interior with an offshore loading facility 1,000 kilometres away in Cameroon. Over the 25-year life of the Doba Basin oil fields, the project is expected to generate $2 bn in additional revenue for Chad, among the poorest countries in the world, and $500 mn for the government of Cameroon. The project is jointly owned by two US oil companies, Exxon-Mobil and Chevron-Texaco, and the Malaysian company Petronas, and was built with nearly $300 mn in loans from the World Bank.



To secure World Bank support for the project, the Chadian government has agreed to a stringent set of controls on the handling and disbursements of the oil revenues. By law, 80 per cent of the revenue will be invested in health, education, transportation and other economic development infrastructure, with 10 per cent set aside for future investment. To ensure transparency, expenditures will be monitored by a committee that includes parliamentarians and members of civil society, while compliance with environmental and human rights standards will be monitored by international agencies. Bank officials argue that the pipeline project could become a model for the responsible exploitation of mineral resources in a region where oil wealth has often contributed to political instability, human rights abuses and environmental pollution. These stipulations followed early criticism of the project by Chadian and international human rights and environmental groups, which prompted the World Bank and other participants to make significant changes in its management and construction. ■

AWARDS

African women honoured

Three African women received awards from US organizations in October for outstanding achievements. **Dr. Nawal M. Nour** from Sudan received one of the $500,000 awards under the MacArthur Foundation's Fellows Programme, which recognizes exceptional creativity, significant accomplishment and potential. In 1999 she founded the African Women's Health Practices clinic at a Boston hospital to address the unique medical and emotional needs of immigrants who had undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) in their home countries. Among other initiatives, she has developed techniques for the surgical reversal of infibulation, the most severe form of FGM. Dr. Nour plans to use the prize money towards expanding the programme in Boston and helping women in Africa.

The Hunger Project, a US-based non-governmental organization, awarded its 2003 Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger to two legal activists fighting for women's rights, who will receive $50,000 each.

Ms. Meaza Ashenafi established the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) in 1995. Among other activities, her group combats domestic violence and sexual abuse, promotes women's social and economic rights, provides free legal aid, produces radio broadcasts and carries out programmes related to civil service reform, women's political participation and access to land.

Ms. Sara Longwe of Zambia has pioneered the use of international human rights law in the fight for women's rights in domestic courts in her country. In 1984, she was a founding member of the Zambia Association for Research and Development, which was instrumental in pushing the government to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Eight years later, citing that ratification, she won a court battle against the Lusaka Intercontinental Hotel, which had refused to admit her because a man did not accompany her. ■

HIV/AIDS

Governance commission launched

The Commission on HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa (CHGA) was officially launched in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in mid-September. It is chaired by Mr. K.Y. Amoako, executive secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and was first announced in February by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The commission's mandate is to study the impact of HIV/AIDS on state structures and economic development in Africa, so as to identify the "complex linkages" between human losses at the local level and their relationship to economic growth and the capacity of health services and state structures to cope with the challenges.

With a secretariat at ECA headquarters in Addis Ababa, the CHGA is composed of 20 commissioners appointed by Mr. Annan. They include the president of Senegal's National Assembly, the managing director of the World Bank, the president of the African Development Bank and Mali's minister of economy and finance, among others. Documents on the commission can be found on the website: <www.uneca.org/chga>. ■

APPOINTMENTS

The UN Secretary-General has appointed Ambassador ***Jacques Paul Klein*** *of the US (left) as his special representative in Liberia. Prior to his recent appointment, Ambassador Klein was the UN special representative and coordinator of UN operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A graduate of the National War College, he is a career senior foreign service officer of the US Department of State.*

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has appointed former Finnish President ***Martti Ahtisaari*** *as his special envoy for the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa. Mr. Ahtisaari has served the UN many times, including as UN Commissioner for Namibia and the Secretary-General's special representative for Yugoslavia.*

Mr. ***Alvaro de Soto*** *(right) of Peru is the new special representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara. Following a long career in Peru's diplomatic service, he became the Secretary-General's special adviser on Cyprus in 1999.*

The Secretary-General has named Mr. ***William Lacy Swing*** *as his special representative for the Democratic Republic of Congo, effective 1 July, succeeding Mr. Amos Namanga Ngongi. Mr. Swing had been the Secretary-General's special representative to Western Sahara since 2001. Prior to that, he served several times as US ambassador, mainly in Africa.*